HOLY MOTHER OF MILK: FEMALE READERS AND THE FUNCTION OF RELIGIOUS AND SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE IN THE GUIDI BOOK OF HOURS

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As members of the Master's Committee, we certify that we have read the thesis prepared by Katherine Raymer, titled *Holy Mother of Milk: Female Readers and the Function of Religious and Scientific Discourse in the Guidi Book of Hours* and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Master's Degree.

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Content

Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of fifteenth-century Italian women's response to the *virgo lactans* and *sacra cintola* images in the Guidi Hours. Analyzing medical and theological discourse, I discuss how the female owner of this object would have understood and been instructed by these images. The purpose of this thesis is to explore this iconography and how they would have functioned within this book of hours, their relationship with the text, as well as the significance of the cultural context of this period.

The first chapter will introduce this paper and discuss my interest in researching this topic. Chapter Two will then outline the history of the Guidi family and discusses the lack of information on the Guidi patron of this prayer book. This chapter will also introduce how books of hours were commonly organized, how they functioned, and in what ways this manuscript is unusual and strays from the typical image cycle for this type of object.

Chapter Three will focus on the image of the *virgo lactans.* After discussing the history and established interpretation of this iconography, the paper will outline medical and religious discourses established by men that related to breastfeeding and motherhood. The paper will then analyze the women of the Middle Ages and Renaissance and their knowledge regarding pregnancy, childbirth, and infants. This paper will then go on to discuss how these teachings would have been known by the female reader and how this established knowledge would have ensured that the image of the *virgo lactans* would have been a continuous reminder for women on how to be physically and spiritually fit for motherhood. Similarly, the fourth chapter will also lay the framework for the history of the *sacra cintola* and how this iconography has been understood by scholars. Chapter Four will discuss the significance of the girdle in northern Italy and look at the cult of the girdle in this region. The paper examines the girdle's close relationship

with physical intimacy and pregnancy and why this image would have been included in the Guidi Hours. The final chapter then summarizes the thesis as well as discusses further research that needs to be taken to fully understand this prayer book.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is intended to be an interdisciplinary study involving the history of specific iconographic images, the history of medicine, and the history of religion in early fifteenth-century Italy. I began this research because of my interest in how mothers were portrayed due to my own status as a mother. Exploring ways in which women were depicted and treated in a time of misogynistic ideals, I further dove into the reasons as to why the history of women has consisted of discrimination, objectification, and fear and how these ideas were being propagated and justified. My findings continuously pointed to contemporaneous religious and medical theories that positioned women in a seat of power, in that they had the ability to disrupt society. Christian sources used Eve, Delilah, Bathsheba, Jezebel, etc. to serve as evidence of women's deceptive and evil nature. Medieval and Renaissance scientific discourses focused on the physical and mental inferiority of women. These two approaches—science and religion—were often intertwined with one another, nearly indiscernible from each other as one repeatedly supported the arguments of the other.

In my research, I came across numerous images of breastfeeding Madonnas, also known as the *virgo lactans,* and I began to consider the reception of female audiences of this image in the context of societal values and understandings. I wanted to analyze the reasons as to why Mary, a woman, was such a prominent figure during an era where women seemed to be seen as the bane of humanity and yet, a necessary evil. Many scholars before me have researched this same subject and through their works, I found myself more intrigued by this subject and by the question of how women would have responded to the *virgo lactans* images in particular.

I turned to books of hours with which a family would have intimately interacted with these objects on a daily basis. It was then that I stumbled upon the Guidi Hours at the Pierpont

Morgan Library in New York. My initial curiosity was soon heightened when I discovered that the content—or rather, the illumination cycle—was unusual; first, it lacked important elements typical for books of hours and second, it strayed away from typical iconography by including two *virgo lactans* and an image of the *sacra cintola*. However, there has been almost no scholarly work done on this unusual manuscript by scholars. In fact, in my research on this object, I have only come across one publication in which the Guidi Hours was briefly mentioned. In her chapter, "From Book to Song: Texts Accompanying the Man of Sorrows in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," Susan Boynton analyzes the ways in which images in books of hours relate to their texts.[1] Her analysis focuses on the Man of Sorrows as a distinct iconographic category and the texts and songs often accompanying these images in various manuscripts. She uses multiple examples of books of hours, including the Office of the Cross in the Guidi Hours, to further emphasize the use of illustrations to evoke the narrative of Christ as the Man of Sorrows. However, there has been no further research, discussion, or analysis done on this particular *horae*, much less on its Marian imagery.

This thesis, then, aims to examine the Guidi Hours in the context of contemporaneous religious and medical teachings in regard to women of the early fifteenth century and the ways in which the narratives they create are visually articulated and actively promulgated through this book's illustrations. To do so, I will analyze this book through a fifteenth-century female reader's perspective to investigate the ways in which women may have understood this prayer book.

[1] Susan Boynton, "From Book to Song: Texts Accompanying the Man of Sorrows in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries" in *New Perspectives on the Man of Sorrows,* edited by Catherine R. Puglisi and William L. Barcham, 117-146 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013).

Chapter 2: The Manuscript, the Patron, and its Readers

On the first page of the Guidi Hours located in the Morgan Library, we find the Guidi coat of arms (Fig. 1). Situated in a barbed quatrefoil frame, like that seen on the south doors of the Florence baptistry created by Andrea Pisano between 1330-1336 (Fig. 2). We find a reference to this family in Dante's *Divine Comedy* in which Dante and Virgil had entered the third ring of the seventh circle of hell and came across three sodomites including Guido Guerra (ca. 1220-1272).[2] All three of the men that Dante mentioned in this level of hell were prominent Florentine figures whom readers would have known, signifying the importance of the Guidi family in the thirteenth century. The Guidi family were an old family established by Emperor Otto I (912-973) as the Counts of Romagna.[3] They had held positions of political power in the regions along the Apennines between Romagna and Tuscany and were known for their pedigree, prestige, and involvement in political strife throughout Italy.[4] However, after repeated inter-family strife and dispersions of power, the Guidi seem to have nearly disappeared from the historical narrative by the mid-fourteenth century.[5] Despite this, it is Jacopo dei Guido di Romagna (d. 1423 or 1428) who is believed to have commissioned the Guidi Hours and who was portrayed on fol. 91r of the Guidi Hours with his patron saint, the Apostle James Major (Fig. 3).

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[2] The other two men were Tegghiaio Aldebrandi and Jacopo Rusticucci. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri* edited and translated by Ronald M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), Canto XVI: 28-39.

[3] Pompeo Litta, *Famiglie Celebri di Italia: Guidi di Romagna* (Milano: Presso P.E. Giusti, 1819-1852), XIX.

[4] Tommaso Casini, "Thirteenth-Century Seigniorial Institutions and Officials of the Guidi Counts," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 80 (2012): 158-164.

[5] Casini (2012), 159.

Between the years of 1819 and 1852 the eighteenth-century Italian historian Pompeo Litta documented the genealogy and life stories of the famous Italian families throughout history in *Famiglie Celebri di Italia* including the Guidi di Romagna family (Fig. 4). While detailed information was divulged in regard to Jacopo's four brothers, all that Litta documented of Jacopo was that he was the son of Malatesta and Jacopa dei Guidi who were the Count and Countess of Dovadola. On November 12, 1423, Jacopo entered Florence with a lance and forty infantrymen in an attempt to take control of the city but by January his coup had been overthrown and records state that he was stripped of his horses, arms, and tools.[6] Litta believed that Jacopo may have died shortly after this and most certainly before 1428.[7] Based on this timeline, the Guidi Hours is assumed to have been created during the first quarter of the fifteenth century.

We can state with some certainty that this book of hours was created for private devotion. The manuscript measures 16 x 12 centimeters, the perfect size for private study or for transporting on journeys. Simply owning such a book would have demonstrated one's education as literacy would have been required to read them. Furthermore, these books would have indicated a higher economic status since they were expensive to produce due to the materials used such as vellum, gold leaf, pigments, etc. as well as to the numerous people involved in the making of one including parchment makers, scribes, artists, binders, and more.[8] The function of

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[6] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Litta, "i quali avevano disperso la sua piccola masnada, e lui spogliato di cavallo, d'armi e di arnese." (XIX).

[7] Litta, "Fu condotto al soldo del comune di Firenze il 12 novembre 1423 con una lancia e 40 fanti, poi cassato dai ruoli in gennaio: ma fu presto assoluto, avendo potuto giustificare che non erasi presentato alla ressegna perchè era stato aggredito dai nemici per via, i quali avevano disperso la sua piccola masnada, e lui spogliato di cavallo, d'armi e di arnese. Morì poco dopo, e certamente prima del 1428." (XIX).

[8] Kurt Barstow, *The Gualenghi-d'Este Hours: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Ferrara* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000), 21.

a book of hours was to provide spiritual guidance by directing readers to different prayers that were meant to be recited at specific times of the day, week, and year. These devotional texts were intended for those belonging to religious orders as well as lay-people. Regular use of a book of hours promoted individual piety since the prayers consumed a portion of each hour of the day and therefore acted as a continuous connection to God.[9] Yet, the number of prayer books produced in Italy, or at least those surviving, appear to be far less in number and much less standardized than those made in Northern Europe.[10]

One of the leading scholars on books of hours was Leon Marie Joseph Delaisse (1914-1972). He was critical of Erwin Panofsky's methodology that awarded too much autonomy to the illustrations and detached them from their text. Instead, Delaisse approached these works as archeological objects in which he would observe and analyze all data in regard to the manuscript to discover their material, textual, and historical significance.[11] Following Delaisse's methodology, we find that books of hours are examples of the ways in which religious culture was disseminated and personalized to suit an individual's needs. Therefore, the peculiar elements of the Guidi Hours, I argue, indicate that it was created for a Jacopo's bride. Furthermore, the medical and religious discourses of the fifteenth century would have actively informed how female readers would have responded to the images within the book.

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[9] Barstow, *The Gualenghi-d'Este Hours: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Ferrara*, 10.

[10] Francesca Manzari, "Italian Books of Hours and Prayer Books in the Fourteenth Century," in *Books of Hours Reconsidered*, ed. S. Hindman and J. Marrow (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2013), 153.

[11] Leon Marie Joseph Delaisse, *Illuminated Manuscripts* (Fribourg: National Trust Office, 1977), 79.

Devotion, whether public or private, was a profoundly personal experience. This holds true for devotion to the Virgin Mary. For example, communal rituals celebrated the Madonna in piazzas, altarpieces regularly displayed her image, and street corners in Italy were often adorned with Marian shrines where individuals could stop to pray.[12] Worship of the Virgin also took place in private spaces within the home with the aid of diverse objects including shrines or small transportable bronze reliefs such as the *Madonna and Child before a Niche* (Fig. 5) which would easily fit into the palm of one's hand. This object is believed to have been made by Donatello in the mid-fifteenth century. The Virgin is depicted in profile view with downcast eyes. Christ sits on her lap with his left arm wrapping around his mother's neck. Framing them is an arch in the shape of a scalloped shell. Plummer argues that the plaquette's small size and worn edges reveals its use as an object that would have been carried in a pocket and touched frequently throughout the day while saying prayers.[13] Portable and private devotional objects like this one,[14] as well as books of hours, were described by Alberti as having the ability to regulate the thoughts of household members and as having the religious authority to create sacred spaces.[15]

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[12] Cecelia Dorger, "Studies in the Image of the Madonna *Lactans* in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Louisville, 2012), 72-73.

[13] Allison Lee Palmer, "The Walters' 'Madonna and Child' Plaquette and Private Devotional Art in Early Renaissance Italy," *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum* 59 (2001): 73.

[14] In addition, Palmer notes that "Galvano Flamma, a trecento chronicler of Milan, described a sudden increase in devotion to the Crucifix during the plague of 1373, when many people began to take small Crucifixes around the streets with them for added protection." (Palmer, "The Walters' 'Madonna and Child' Plaquette and Private Devotional Art in Early Renaissance Italy," 73).

[15] Palmer, 78-79.

Books of hours divided days into different canonical hours in which different prayers were meant to be recited—matins, lauds, prime, terce, sext, none, vespers, and compline.[16] From the fourteenth until the sixteenth centuries, these books would be the most common objects for purposes of private devotion. What is unusual about the Guidi Hours, however, is that it lacks a calendar as well as an Office of the Dead. A typical book of hours would consist of a calendar, Gospel Lessons, the Office of the Virgin in the center of the book, followed by the Office of the Cross, Office of the Holy Spirit, two Marian prayers, Penitential Psalms and litany, the Office of the Dead, and finally, suffrages to the saints.[17] In contrast, the Guidi Hours contains only the Office of the Virgin, Office of the Cross, and suffrages to the saints. Calendars served as a reminder of important religious days of the year on which certain prayers were meant to be said. The Office of the Dead contained prayers to be recited to remind the reader of their mortality and need for salvation. Integral to funeral services, guild commemorations, chapel services, etc., the prayers within the Office of the Dead aided in freeing souls from purgatory.[18] The absence of these essential elements indicates that the work on the manuscript ended abruptly perhaps due to the patron's lack of funds or his sudden death.

Pages in books of hours, including the Guidi manuscript, are filled with devotions extracted from the scriptures with a particular emphasis on the Psalms and sapiential books as

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[16] Barstow, 9.

[17] Robert Wieck, "Minding Time: Books of Hours," in *Beyond Words: Illuminated Manuscripts in Boston Collections*, edited by Jeffrey F. Hamburger, William P. Stoneman, Anne-Marie Eze, Lisa Fagin Davis and Nancy Netzer (Boston: McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2016), 133.

[18] Charity Scott-Stokes, *Women's Books of Hours in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 14.

well as various prayers.[19] Each written text was meant to evoke an emotional, spiritual, and physical experience for the reader. Reading was an active process as these books were made to produce these responses as the reader sang, spoke, or read the text aloud.[20] The small size of the images forces the viewer to be close to the object, thus creating an intimacy between the two as the reader's fingers brushed over the pages with his or her eyes focused on the images and words. Through repetitious readings, the illustrations and text would eventually be committed to memory and Smith argues that they would mutually reinforce one another, enhancing the reading experience, and serve as mnemonic devices.[21] Whenever these prayers were said, the reader would recall the illustrations from their books of hours and vice versa, both became part of an associative process of the other.[22]

According to the original curator of this object, the Guidi Hours is believed to have been illuminated by a Romagnesque miniaturist and created in the atelier of Petrus Parmensis in the Lombard region.[23] The text was written on vellum, a material that was much more expensive than parchment, and was more than likely the work of several scribes. Blank pages in the book

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[19] Adelaide Bennett, "A Thirteenth-Century French Book of Hours for Marie" *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 54 (1996): 21.

[20] Jeffrey F. Hamburger "Authors and Readers," in *Beyond Words: Illuminated Manuscripts in Boston Collections,* edited by Jeffrey F. Hamburger, William P. Stoneman, Anne-Marie Eze, Lisa Fagin Davis and Nancy Netzer (Boston: McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2016), 38.

[21] Kathryn A. Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England: Three Women and their Books of Hours* (London: The British Library and University of Toronto Press, 2003), 168-169.

[22] Smith, *Art, Identity and Devotion in Fourteenth-Century England: Three Women and their Books of Hours,* 236

[23] "MS M.3" (Curatorial description, New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1952), 1.

after folio 88 indicate that it is incomplete. The binding is French and dated to 1640, commissioned by Robert Arnauld, Sieur d'Andilly (1588-1674)[24] and his wife Catherine le Fevre de la Borderie (1598-1637).[25] Presumably, the couple rebound the book after obtaining it. There are a total of twenty-seven miniatures, nine historiated initials, and one hundred twenty-seven leaves.

Within the manuscript, the iconography in the Office of the Virgin departs from the customary cycle found in books of hours. Typically, the scenes would depict the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Annunciation to the Shepherds, the Adoration of the Magi, the Presentation in the Temple, the Flight into Egypt, and end with the Coronation of the Virgin. However, this book replaces the Annunciation to the Shepherds and the Flight into Egypt with the Madonna of Humility and the Virgin giving her girdle to Saint Thomas. My thesis attempts to explain these iconographic irregularities through an analysis of religious and medical discourses focused on women and breastfeeding.

Often given to women on their wedding day, books of hours and other bridal gifts served to promote fertility and piety.[26] Her wedding is when a woman often received her first personal devotional object, either from her own family or from her husband as part of her counter dowry.[27] A number of examples survive of books made specifically for women and that

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[24] He was king's councilor and the author of several religious works.

[25] Dame de Pomponne.

[26] Walter Stephens, "Sex, Popular Beliefs, and Culture: 'In the Waie of Lecherie'," in *A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Renaissance*, edited by Bette Talvacchia (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2011).

[27] Palmer, "The Walters' 'Madonna and Child' Plaquette and Private Devotional Art in Early Renaissance Italy," 80.

instructed them on how to be model women and Christians.[28] In fact, Manzari's discovery of French women married to the Italian Visconti family purchasing devotional books led her to believe that these women may have even introduced these objects to Lombardy.[29] Other books of hours sometimes disclosed to whom the book would be gifted in the very beginning pages, such as the Italian Hours of the Virgin dedicated to Cecilia Gonzaga (d. 1474).[30] Other times, a woman's name is mentioned throughout the text as seen in the book of hours believed to have been made for a woman named Beatricina.[31] Prayers were carefully selected for the female reader and, in a sense, acted as religious versions of etiquette books of proper behavior.[32]

Books of hours were sometimes even considered to be magical, protecting their reader in a fashion similar to religious relics.[33] They were often concerned with pregnancy and childbirth, both of which tended to carry a high risk of fatality for the mother and the child. If prayers and material items were capable of curing or preventing illnesses, the images within books of hours were undoubtedly thought to have had these same abilities. In this respect, miniature illustrations must have been held in high regard and considered to have miraculous properties. Like other religious imagery,[34] they would have been defined as sacred and able to answer prayers.[35]

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[28] Bennett, "A Thirteenth-Century French Book of Hours for Marie," 29.

[29] Manzari, "Italian Books of Hours and Prayer Books in the Fourteenth Century," 175.

[30] "MS M.454" (Curatorial description, New York: Pierpont Morgan Library), 1.

[31] Manzari, 184.

[32] Bennett, 29.

[33] Smith, 252-255.

[34] Further studies may want to analyze why the admiration for these objects and the powers attributed to them was not considered idolatry.

[35] Dorger, "Studies in the Image of the Madonna *Lactans*," 108.

Schaefer argued that these prayers were usually incorporated into the matins and accompanied by representations of the Annunciation so that when a woman was in labor she would recall the image of the Virgin in hopes to receive divine intervention to relieve her pain.[36]

Books of hours were produced for female readers also because women were considered to be less capable of resisting temptation and needed constant guidance and reminders of appropriate behavior.[37] Women were considered to be defective physically and spiritually due to their uncontrollable sexual appetite, and inferior to men in intellect and morality.[38] The Italian jurist, Baldis de Ubaldis (1327-1400), explained that due to women's inability to control their own behaviors, laws were set in place to preserve their chastity and honesty whereas it was believed that men did not need such regulations.[39] Because women were incapable of repressing their urges and in need of legislative intervention to govern their inner nature, constant devotion was believed to be a solution to keep women under control during times when men were absent. Private but guided (through image and text) devotion provided a mechanism for encouraging women's submission to religious and physical expectations, which explains why so many books of hours were created for female readers. Prayers functioned as continuous reminders of their duties as women and Christians and illustrations often depicted virtues expected of them—

[36] Laura Isern Schaefer, "The Iconography of the Madonna Lactans in the Thirteenth and Sixteenth Centuries Italian Art: Lithurgy and Devotion" (Master's thesis, University of London, 2014), 38.

[37] Schaefer, "The Iconography of the Madonna Lactans," 37.

[38] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 135.

[39] Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 51.

obedience, chastity, etc.[40] Therefore, images of and prayers to the Virgin contained a second layer of meaning for women.

It is likely that this manuscript would have been gifted to a woman marrying Jacopo due to the Guidi crest located on the first page and the image of him on fol. 91r. Nuptial gifts were given as a counter dowry to ward off evil spirits, create a bond between the couple, and were thought to have had magical powers that allowed for a favorable and successful consummation.[41] The inclusion of the new family coat of arms served as a reminder to demonstrate the transferral of power over the woman from her father to her husband—the natal family to the marital one—since Florentine law required women to be under the guardianship of a man.[42] However, this law only applied when a woman wanted to engage in legal transactions and marriages were only considered valid if both the husband and wife had consented to it.[43] The woman receiving this gift would have more than likely been in her early to mid-teens because younger women were thought to have less moral defects and could handle childbirth more easily than older women.[44] It was typical for marriages to act as a union between powerful families since a woman's worth was appraised based on her potential to bear sons, her submissiveness, and her family's

[40] Schaefer, 37.

[41] Julius Kirshner, *Marriage, Dowry, and Citizenship in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 59.

[42] Thomas Kuehn, *Law, Family, and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 204.

[43] Kuehn, 215.

[44] Anthony Molho, "Deception and Marriage Strategy in Renaissance Florence: The Case of Women's Ages," *Renaissance Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1988): 205.

resources.[45] While it is possible that her family may have been of a lower status than the Guidi, it is more likely that her family was of equal standing, if not higher, indicating that she too would have had been able to read and write. Furthermore, this book would have been read and passed on to her future daughters so that they too could understand the expectations and values that they were meant to uphold.

Although the Guidi family was a prominent and powerful family in Italy before the fifteenth century, their status had diminished drastically by the time the Guidi Hours had been produced. Jacopo's ability to attempt to take control of Florence alludes to the lingering elevated status of the Guidi family but far from the impressive status they once held. Due to the lack of documentation, it is impossible to view this book of hours in the context of the Guidi family with complete accuracy. Instead, we must speculate that the main reader would have been a young woman betrothed to a member of the Guidi family. Furthermore, the manuscript's deviation from typical books of hours allows us to further argue for a female readership and to examine the ways in which theological and medical discourses would have shaped the response of this female reader to these unique images and their texts.

[45] Kuehn, *Law, Family, and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy,* 221.

Chapter 3: The Virgo Lactans, Mothers, and Breastfeeding

By the fifteenth century, all aspects of motherhood were scrutinized by social and theological authorities in Italy. According to theological and medical sources, milk of mothers—and *the* Mother—did not suffice as simply food but included spiritual nourishment and symbolized knowledge, wisdom, and mercy. In this way, the Virgin's breast became both the signifier and the signified, the physical body and the representation of Mary's humility.[46]

The story of Mary's life and confirmation of her breastfeeding Jesus was initially described in the apocryphal text of Saint James in the second century "And immediately, the cloud withdrew from the cave and a great light appeared in the cave so that their eyes could not bear it. And a little while later the same light withdrew until an infant appeared. And he came and took the breast of his mother, Mary" (James 19:4-5). However, images of the breastfeeding Madonna, the *virgo lactans,* did not begin to appear in Italy until the 14th century.[47] This imagery quickly became prominent in various artistic mediums throughout Europe. The corpus of this imagery included depictions of Jesus nursing, Mary offering her breast to an adult Christ, or Mary presenting her breast to her infant who has not yet latched onto her exposed nipple.[48] Comparing other examples of the *virgo lactans* to the ones found in the Guidi Hours, I will examine the ways in which the female body and the act of nursing were constructed as theological and medical subjects and how this would have affected the reader.

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[46] Seasonwein, "The Nursing Queen: Sculptures of the 'Virgo Lactans' in Late Medieval France," 82.

[47] Anne Ashton, "Interpreting Breast Iconography in Italian Art, 1250-1600" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of St. Andrews, 2014), 45.

[48] Seasonwein, 21-22.

On folio 1v, the first page of the book, we find an image of the *virgo lactans* above the Guidi di Romagna coat of arms (Fig. 6). The page has a gold border and the image of Mary is framed by lilies. The text above the Virgin states, "Here begins the services of the Virgin Mary according to the practices of the Roman Church for matins" (James 19:15-16). Mary smiles as she looks down at the baby Jesus suckling at her one exposed breast. We find a motif of small gold-leaf dots making a flower shape all over her cloak. Mary's right hand is placed on her lap and acts as a support for the baby's back while her left-hand holds his legs and keeps him from falling (Fig. 7). The two figures are surrounded by sun-like rays inside a large decorated initial, D and underneath the image are letters that spell, "omine", or "Domine." Gold leafing is found in small quantities across the entirety of the page, accentuating tiny and painstaking details. Various colors such as red, blue, green, pink, and yellow embellish the page and most of the blank space is filled with thin lines crossing one another or ornate decorations. The very bottom of the page is adorned with upside down flowers that sprout branches with clusters of grapes as well as various foliage.

The second image of the Madonna breastfeeding the Christ child (Fig. 8) is located on folio 59v. Here, the Virgin is unaccompanied by text and the stark contrast in the rendering of both figures of Mary suggests a different miniature artist was hired for at least portions of the manuscript. While the image of Mary and Christ occupy the entirety of the page, compared to the first image, there is far less detail. Mary does not seem to express the same emotion as the first image. Instead, she appears somewhat sorrowful about her role as a mother. The wall behind her is covered in gold-leaf, now flaking away due to age. Her halo is indicated by a simple thin line around her head done in black ink. Compared to the image on folio 1v, Mary's blue cloak appears dull. Her torso looks almost nude covered in faint vertical lines where her dress would

be rather than the vibrant red of the Virgin's apparel on fol. 1v. The halo belonging to Jesus is slightly more decorated as it alternates between orange and gold sections. The breast he sucks on imitates the first image, in that it has a cone-like shape and is placed oddly high on Mary's chest. Other than the green floor and pillow that acts as a resting spot for the mother and child, the image feels barren. The Madonna on fol. 1v was surrounded by details that covered nearly every inch of the page, but this Mary is awkwardly isolated, emphasizing the sadness on her face. Since this image precedes the Office of the Cross, perhaps her somber look was purposeful, cuing the reader that the following folios would portray the events that led up to the death of her child. Since it is clear that the book was unfinished, we cannot fully analyze the second *virgo lactans* in terms of the viewer's perception of meaning without making too many assumptions. Therefore, we must instead focus on the illumination on folio 1.

The fact that the Guidi book of hours opens with this particular iconography may provide evidence that the image functioned as more than simple decoration. The text accompanying the *virgo lactans* on fol. 1 is from Psalm 51:15, "Domine labia mea aperies. Et os meum annunciabit laudem tuam" (O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise).[49] This beginning text refers to the shame of sin sealing the mouth shut and God's forgiveness reopening it and allowing sinners to praise God and become witnesses for others. The Virgin Mary sits within the initial "D" that leads into the prayer of opening one's mouth to testify and praise the Lord. In this image we see Christ opening his mouth and drinking from her breast. Breastmilk, as will be discussed more thoroughly later on, was seen as more than just food but quite literally as

[49] All biblical references for this paper come from the King James Version Bible unless otherwise noted.

spiritual nourishment.[50] Mary is shown enveloped in the readers' words as they begin their praise to God. She is also depicted as breastfeeding, an act with which any mother would associate and could feel connected to such as the Guidi reader and her daughters. Although Mary's halo and rays of light crowning her silhouette indicate her status as a divine figure, women are able to identify with her and view the image as a mother in the midst of a biological function, breastfeeding her child. In doing so, the artist depicted Mary and Jesus participating in fully human activities.

The *virgo lactans* has been a subject of analysis by many scholars. Margaret Miles discussed the Virgin's bare breast in numerous publications. Using Foucault's theory of biopolitics, Miles argued that artists disfigured Mary's body as a means to avoid eroticizing a divine figure. Because the Virgin signified women's power to produce and sustain life and by displaying a mother as someone who could conceive without intercourse, Miles asserts that women would be unable to identify with the Virgin, thus allowing patriarchal societies to maintain their control over women's bodies.[51] Caroline Bynum also considered how Medieval viewers would have responded to the lactating Madonna. Bynum argues that due to the breast's ability to lactate it would have been associated with food and viewers would have then made a connection with Mary and the Eucharist.[52] Anne Ashton reexamined the Medieval interpretations of *virgo lactans* in her dissertation, "Interpreting Breast Iconography in Italian Art, 1250-1600." However, Ashton's thesis follows the history of this imagery, its influences, as well as the cult of

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[50] Marilyn Yalom, *A History of the Breast* (New York: Random House, Inc, 1997), 38.

[51] Margaret Miles, *A Complex Delight: The Secularization of the Breast, 1350-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

[52] Caroline Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 2012).

Mary to argue that the fall of this motif by the sixteenth century was due to the overt sexualization of the Virgin.[53] In her 2010 dissertation, "The Nursing Queen: Sculptures of the Virgo Lactans in Late Medieval France," Johanna Seasonwein discussed the ways medieval viewers would have understood these sculptures in light of medieval attitudes towards the breast and breastfeeding. She examined the Marian cult, milk relics, and milk as a metaphor to argue that the rise in popularity of these sculptures was directly related to the mendicant orders as well as the emphasis on salvation as a physical experience. Cecilia Dorger's 2012 dissertation, "Studies in the Image of the Madonna Lactans in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy," uses a similar approach as Seasonwein but also views the scientific studies, period laws, and iconographic analysis of Italy to examine the *virgo lactans.* She argues that these images were believed to be a conduit to the divine especially for nuns and religious women whose goal would have been to achieve intimacy with Christ through these images. The corpus of research on breastfeeding Madonnas unanimously maintains that while a more contemporary audience may view the presentation of Mary's breast as erotic and secular, a medieval audience would have looked at these images in a religious context. My paper intends to use these previous publications as examples to further analyze the iconography of the *virgo lactans* in the Guidi Hours specifically by looking closer at the religious and medical beliefs and how female readers would have used these objects and images.

Depictions of the suckling child were not uncommon throughout Europe in the fourteenth century in various mediums. The first image of the bare-breasted Virgin appeared in Tuscany in the fourteenth century, when there appears to be a shift away from the imagery of the Eucharist—where Christ feeds believers with his blood—to the Virgin feeding Christ with her

[53] Ashton, *Interpreting Breast Iconography in Italian Art, 1250-1600.*

milk.[54] According to the doctrine of transubstantiation, during communion, the Eucharist is thought to literally become the flesh and blood of Christ. Corresponding to this belief, Christ's body was formed by the Virgin and, in addition, she provided Christ with his blood.[55] Her body is intimately intertwined with Christ's own and images of the *virgo lactans* seems to, in a way, serve as an antithesis to the commemoration of the Last Supper. Nursing is associated with new life whereas the Eucharist is a recognition of Jesus' sacrifice. Furthermore, rather than bread and wine transforming into Christ's body, Mary's divine breast and milk became his body. In this light, we can see then that the physical location of images with this subject matter became sacred spaces devoted to the life and death of Jesus through the Virgin as mother.

Shortly after its first appearance, the image of Mary offering her breast to her infant became a prominent image throughout Europe in the fourteenth century. This iconography also happened to correlate with a period of high death rates throughout Europe due to reoccurring episodes of the bubonic plague, famines, unusual freezes, storms, and floods.[56] In addition, wars during these periods broke out often, especially between Florence and surrounding lands, and these conflicts added even more victims to the already high death toll. As population numbers dwindled, the symbol of a fattened and healthy child being fed by a beautiful young mother must have functioned as a hopeful image for the majority of Europeans. Examples of these *virgo lactans* span the continent throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The lactating Virgin was more frequently found in art mediums outside of manuscripts and were often involved with

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[54] Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *Imagining Mary* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 115.

[55] Ashton, 53.

[56] J. A. Bouchon, *Chroniques d'Enguerrand de Monstrelet* (Paris, 1826), 1-2 quoted in Wellman, *Queens and Mistresses of Renaissance France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 22.

private devotion like Agnolo Gaddi's *Madonna and Child Adored by Two Angels* from the late fourteenth century in Milan (Fig. 9). Conventional *virgo lactans*, images like this one, depicted Mary's revealed breast jutting awkwardly out from her shoulder while the covered one remained flat and non-existent. Typically, the Madonna of Humility often had clear Byzantine stylistic influences, empty gold backgrounds, and the mother and child were accompanied by two or more angels. Additionally, Jesus was customarily shown in the act of suckling, effectively hiding Mary's nipple from the viewer. In later images, artists deviated from this tradition by portraying Mary stimulating her nipple and actively preparing to feed her child as seen in Bernardo Zenale's *Madonna and Child with Angels* from the sixteenth century (Fig. 10).

In *A Complex Delight,* Miles discussed how the medieval female viewer was likely to associate herself with the Virgin.[57] In these earlier images, the breast appeared as a single round object, rather than a set of two, just as we see in the Guidi Hours. One side of the Virgin's chest is flat while the exposed breast appears misshapen, out of place, and stylistically disconnected to the rest of the body. In her publication, Miles argues that artists did this in order to remove any association with eroticism and to instead render the breast as a source of nourishment, completely desexualized.[58] What is more, due to Mary's divinity, portrayals of her nursing promotes this action from a mortal to sacred activity.[59] According to Bartholomew the Englishman (1203-1272), motherhood was attributed to the woman who actually breastfed the child and so, motherhood would have also been considered a holy occupation.[60]

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[57] Miles, *A Complex Delight: The Secularization of the Breast 1350-1750*.

[58] Miles (2008), 34.

[59] Yalom, *A History of the Breast*, 48.

[60] Yalom, 36.

Although we find many *virgo lactans* in most artistic mediums, they are scarce in a book of hours. Even more unusual is that in the Guidi Hours, not only is it the first image one sees when opening the book, but this image appears twice, bracketing the Hours of the Virgin. Typically, if the Christ child was shown suckling at the Virgin's breast it appeared in the scene of Mary and Joseph resting on their flight to Egypt as seen in the Hours of Cecilia Gonzaga from ca. 1470 (Fig. 11). However, we do find examples of historiated initials containing the nursing Madonna in two Dutch books of hours, the Brabant Hours (Fig. 12) dating to the last quarter of the thirteenth century and the Bavaria Hours (Fig. 13) from ca. 1405-1410. Other than a similar placement of the Madonna, the books appear to be completely unrelated to the Guidi Hours and there seems to be no evidence that would indicate that the Guidi artist would have been aware of these works. Considering that it was rare for artists of this time to veer too far away from iconographic norms, the unusual image cycle suggests that Jacopo would have requested these images specifically. Yet, because the artist would not have been able to easily call on other pictorial examples in books of hours, the expectation of artistic creativity may have resulted in a higher price tag, further demonstrating both an individualization of this book as well as the prestige of the Guidi family.[61]

Theological discourse in regard to women portrayed woman's role as a passive and supportive member of the household. These ideals were preached by the clergy and repeated through religious texts such as the Bible and prayers. Eve, born from the rib of Adam, was thought to lack his rationality and in Genesis 3 Eve disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit resulting in her and Adam's expulsion from the garden of Eden. As further punishment, the Bible

[61] Jonathan J. G. Alexander, *The Painted Book in Renaissance Italy 1450-1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016) 237.

describes God as turning to Eve and "unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." (Genesis 3:16). The Bible goes on to explain how this act resulted in introducing original sin to all of humanity by transferring Eve's irrepressible urges to all of their offspring through blood. According to medieval medical sources, a woman stopped menstruating after becoming pregnant because the fetus was supplied with this blood as nourishment. After birth, the breast milk was believed to be this same menstrual blood diverted to the breast and heated until it was purified.[62] The Italian Dominican friar, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), stated that "this purified blood is however always stained by a certain corruption, by an impurity due to desire, for it is drawn into the uterus only by copulation."[63]

A woman's breast milk was believed to be able to transfer behaviors, physical attributes, piety, virtues, and more as evidenced by religious figures such as Saint Bernardino of Siena who warned against feeding infants with "polluted blood."[64] Polluted blood could be associated with a multitude of defects, from women who were sexually active, those who had too large or too small of breasts, those who were not in good moral standing or of an inadequate temperament.[65] These teachings would have been especially important for our teenage Guidi reader. Her status

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[62] Alicia Myers, *Blessed Among Women?: Mothers and Motherhood in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 80.

[63] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, cited in Danielle Jacquart and Claude Alexandre Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 76-77.

[64] To find out more look at *The Family in Renaissance Florence* by Leon Battista Alberti, *Secreti Medicinali* by Pietro Bairo, Trotula, etc.

[65] Caroline Castiglione, "Peasants at the Palace: Wet Nurses and Aristocratic Mothers in Early Modern Rome," in *Medieval and Renaissance Lactations: Images, Rhetorics, Practices*, edited by Jutta Sperling (New York: Routledge, 2013), 83.

as a virgin would have been reiterated throughout her life as a crucial aspect when she came of age it came to find potential suitors or for her to join the convent especially due to her family's higher social standing. According to Fra Giovanni Domini, a Dominican preacher around Florence in the early fifteenth century, education was especially vital for young girls that detailed aspects of domestic duties and emphasized a wife's most important virtues; morality, chastity, modesty, fidelity, and love.[66] She would have viewed the Virgin as her model, a woman who maintained a perpetual state of virginity and was always submissive, charitable, and sacred.

While the mother was believed to be the best source for milk, medical texts often contained instructions for choosing a wet nurse, listing attributes to look for as well as those to avoid and explaining how to test a wet nurse's breast, and how to determine the health of the breast.[67] These medical texts were written by men and widely distributed among the public. However, the responsibility of delivering children was held solely by a staff of female midwives and female attendants.[68] Inside of birthing chambers was a woman's world and while men often attempted to provide instruction for childbirth, women were the ones relied on to have enough medical knowledge to safely care for the mother and infant. The first manual for midwifery was written by a man and introduced in Italy in 1595 by Giralamo Mercurio, *La Commare o Raccoglitrice.* However, while this book seemed to have been highly regarded, male physicians were not actively involved with childbirth or even with infants until much later in the seventeenth century. Caroline Castiglione examined many letters exchanged between women

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[66] Palmer, 79-81.

[67] Johanna Seasonwein, "The Nursing Queen: Sculptures of the "Virgo Lactans" in Late Medieval France" (Ph.D. dissertation Columbia University, 201), 137.

[68] J. F. Benton, "Trotula, Women's Problems, and the Professionalization of Medicine in the Middle Ages," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 59, no. 1 (1985): 30.

including Eleonora Borghese and her daughter Ippolita from 1685. In the written exchanges, Eleonora gave advice in regard to breastfeeding and challenged the new roles of male physicians in the treatment of very young children.[69]

Many of the medieval discourses regarding a woman's body, pregnancy, and infant care were founded in the teachings of Aristotle, Galen, and Hippocrates. It was their writings that provided the foundation of knowledge regarding conception, reproduction, and female anatomy for male physicians of the Middle Ages.[70] It was believed that an actual tube connected the uterus to the breasts as seen in an anatomical drawing by Leonardo da Vinci (Fig. 14).[71] Women were believed to be cold and wet whereas men were hot and dry. Women's lack of heat was thought to be why women were weaker in quality, more prone to sickness, and the result of an inferior conception.[72] Among discussions of the distinct differences between men and women, such texts also discussed the appropriate behaviors of pregnant women. Galen ordered that all women abstain from sex during pregnancy until the child had been weaned from the breast. "There is nothing worse for the suckling infant because while pregnant, the best of the mother's

[69] Castiglione, "Peasants at the Palace: Wet Nurses and Aristocratic Mothers in Early Modern Rome," 93.

[70] Cynthia Klestinee, "Sex, Medicine, and Disease: Welcoming Wombs and Vernacular Anatomies," in *A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Renaissance*, edited by Bette Talvacchia (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2011).

[71] Dorger, 36.

[72] Elizabeth Pearl Mason Hohl, *The Diseases of Women* (Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1940), 1-2.

blood goes to the foetus. Because of this the pregnant woman's blood becomes inferior and not only less, but inferior milk collects in her breasts."[73]

The Guidi reader would have seen herself as entirely different than that of men as she would have attended church services in which this was continuously addressed. However, her female relatives were the ones who would have further explained these biological differences and woman's knowledge in regard to sex, pregnancy, and infant care. In *Daughters of Alchemy* Meredith Ray analyzed Italian women's "books of secrets" and how they were traded, influential, and developed.[74] She focuses on a handful of women from the 16th and 17th centuries but the information within these documents came from centuries of practice and experimentation. These books contained scientific experiments and recipes that dealt with "gendered problems" such as removing stains, beauty products, health remedies, fertility, women's health and more that are believed to have been developed by women. However, her research seems to allude to the fact that these books were often owned and distributed by upper class women.[75] While our reader would not have been involved with academic medicine, she would have surely owned one of these objects. As such, these books of secrets reveal that she would have been a respected authority when it came to domestic spaces as well as childbirth and care and well aware of the medical discourses surrounding female anatomy.

The *virgo lactans* would have been interpreted by the fifteenth-century woman entering into the Guidi family within the context of the discussed medical and religious teachings

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[73] Robert M. Green, *A translation of Galen's Hygiene: De sanitate tuenda* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1951), 29-30.

[74] Meredith K. Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[75] Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy,* 9-10.

pertaining to motherhood. The Guidi Hours immediately opened to a scene of the lactating Madonna but the woman engaging with this book would have seen a child at the breast of his mother. Her marriage into the Guidi family would come with the expectation of providing her husband with male heirs and the iconography of the *virgo lactans* would have reminded her of the social and religious risks that the status of motherhood carried. Her value as a woman and as a Christian would determine the condition of her milk and the quality of her children. The manuscript itself utilizes physical interaction in touch, sound, and sight to instill the reader with the image of Mary as the ideal mother. In addition, the prayers within the Guidi Hours were ones that were often used outside of the home such as in church, processions, and political displays. This use of common devotions would have compelled this woman to recall the imagery of her manuscript even when it was not directly in front of her, serving as a continuous reminder to aspire to be a woman fit physically and spiritually for motherhood.

Chapter 4: The Sacra Cintola, Copulation, and Pregnancy

Women who were unable to produce milk often turned to praying to the Virgin and making pilgrimages to shrines containing her relics in the hopes that Mary would provide them with a lactation miracle.[76] One such relic was that of the Virgin's girdle that had been given to Saint Thomas as she ascended into Heaven as seen on fol. 34v in the Guidi Hours (Fig. 15). Here, Mary is framed by sun rays at the top of the page surrounded by six angels. Her right hand holds the girdle that falls down to the Earth and into Thomas' outstretched hands. Where we previously saw her in blue and red, here her clothing is all white, matching the ghost-pale skin of all the figures within the book. All of the figures gaze directly at her, but her eyes appear to focus on something to her left, outside of our view. Under the scene, Solomon appears in the initial D and raises his left hand, pointing to the illumination above him. His right hand holds a scroll inscribed with "*Cantorum quae est iste quae ascendit*" (Who is this who ascends) from Song of Solomon 3:6. To the right of Solomon are the vespers, or evening prayers beginning with "*Deus in adiutorium meum intende. Domine ad adiuuandum me festina. Gloria patri et filio et spiritui sancto. Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper. Et in secula seculorum amen. Alleluia*" (Oh God, come to my assistance. Oh Lord, make haste to help me. Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, now, and forever more. Amen).

[76] Seasonwein, "The Nursing Queen: Sculptures of the "Virgo Lactans" in Late Medieval France," 81.

Elaine Tulanowski examined the generalized interpretations of the Madonna Cintola by previous scholars like Else von Staedel,[77] Benedicto Nieto,[78] Anna Jameson,[79] Louis Reau,[80] Gertrud Schiller,[81] etc. in order to bring these studies into a more focused analysis of the late Quattrocento. The popularization of the image cycle of Saint Thomas receiving the girdle from the Madonna is attributed to the *Golden Legend*,[82] compiled around 1260 by Jacobus de Voragine (1230-1298).[83] In the story, the Virgin Mary had died while Thomas had been away preaching the gospel. When he returned and heard of her death he refused to believe that she had ascended into heaven when suddenly, the girdle she had worn fell into his hands. The belt provided proof that the Virgin's Assumption was corporeal, but the item also served as a metaphor of her virginity. This iconography, however, has typically been interpreted as the Virgin's role as intercessor between man and God and her girdle physically connected the realms of heaven and earth.[84]

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[77] Else von Staedel, *Ikonographie der Himmelfahrt Mariens* (Strassburg: Heitz, 1935).

[78] Benedicto Nieto, *La Asuncion de la Virgen en el Arte* (Madrid; Aguado, 1950).

[79] Anna Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna*, A vols. (New York; Houghton, 1877) 2; 347-360.

[80] Louis Reau, *Iconographie de 1' Art Chretien*, 3 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955-1959) 11, 2: 597-621.

[81] Gertrud Schiller, *Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst*, 4 vols. (Gutersloh: Mohn, 1968-1980) IV. 2: 93-114.

[82] Jacobus De Voragine, "The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary." In *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints,* translated by William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[83] Erin Benay, "The Pursuit of Truth and the Doubting Thomas in the Art of Early Modern Italy" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers, 2009), 3.

[84] Elaine G. Tulanowski, "The Iconography of the Assumption of the Virgin in Italian Paintings: 1480-1580 (Volumes I and II)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1986), 17.

Evidence suggests that Florentine interest in the *sacra cintola* iconography becomes prevalent by the early 1350s,[85] although images of this subject do not seem to appear nearly as frequently as the *virgo lactans*. One page in a codex belonging to the Marcovaldi family in Prato dating sometime between 1384 and 1428 (Fig. 16), discusses the legend regarding the Madonna and her girdle. On the top left-hand corner of this page is the Madonna dressed in the same white outfit similar to the one she wears in the Guidi Hours. She is framed by a gold leaf background and the top of the page as well as the left-hand side is decorated in similar foliage as the ones throughout our book of hours. Mary is seen handing her girdle down to Thomas who is framed by a red and pink flower with a gold leaf background. The way that these figures, especially Thomas, have been rendered is reminiscent of the figures throughout the Guidi Hours. Because both of these manuscripts were made around the same time and first appear in cities that are in close proximity to one another, it seems reasonable to assume that they may have been made in the same workshop or that the artists would have at least been aware of each other's works.

Another contemporaneous by Agnolo Gaddi appears in the cathedral of San Stefano (Fig. 17). The Cappella della Sacra Cintola, or the Chapel of the Holy Belt, was built by Lorenzo di Filippo between 1386 and 1390. In this fresco, Mary sits in a gold oval frame and passes down her girdle to Thomas located on the lower left. Mary is surrounded by six angels who appear to have inspired the angels in the girdle scene of the Guidi Hours judging from similar hairstyles as well as the rendering of their thin flat bodies and pointed wings. The similarities between these images in Prato and the Guidi Hours seem to indicate that Jacopo would have been in this region either immediately before or when he commissioned his book of hours.

[85] Brendan Cassidy, "A Relic, Some Pictures and the Mothers of Florence in the Late Fourteenth Century," *Gesta* 30, no. 2 (1991): 95.

Birth objects such as books, girdles, cribs, birthing chairs, and other various items were often given to women as gifts at the time of marriage or while they were pregnant. These items were believed to be powerful objects that could assist in a safe delivery but that could also guarantee a successful conception—the birth of a male child.[86] Records indicate that fathers often gifted higher cash rewards to midwives after a male child was born.[87] The Virgin's girdle was treated as a relic specifically for childbirth.[88] Threads that had simply been in contact with the girdle would have been given to women in hopes that the threads would be able to aid the women during labor and alleviate pain.[89] Often, women would wear prayers or charms tucked into or inscribed on their girdle to help with pregnancy.[90] Charms were typically herbal remedies concocted from a physician's book, also known as a girdle book, which contained calendars, charts, and texts relating to favorable astrological times to practice medical procedures as well as recipes that were believed to alleviate various ailments including those related to pregnancy.[91] Girdles were given to women before or during pregnancy as a reminder that a successful marriage often relied on the woman's ability to become pregnant since infertility and barrenness

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[86] Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 142.

[87] Ann Rosalind Jones, "Heterosexuality: A Beast with Many Backs," in *A Cultural History of Sexuality in the Renaissance*, edited by Bette Talvacchia (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2011).

[88] Smith, 255.

[89] Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, 144.

[90] Scott-Stokes, *Women's Books of Hours in Medieval England,* 16.

[91] Susan L'Engle, "The Rise of the Professions: Medicine and Law," in *Beyond Words: Illuminated Manuscripts in Boston Collections*, edited by Jeffrey F. Hamburger, William P. Stoneman, Anne-Marie Eze, Lisa Fagin Davis and Nancy Netzer (Boston: McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2016), 199.

was grounds for divorce.[92] The image of the *sacra cintola* in the Guidi Hours would have not only promoted fertility but also encouraged the woman reading it to have frequent pregnancies.

The girdle believed to belong to the Virgin Mary's is kept in the cathedral of San Stefano in Prato, the same church where the Gaddi's fresco is located. Relics, or secondary relics, of Mary were held in high esteem during the Middle Ages and people would go on long pilgrimages to see these objects making them known throughout Italy. Since Mary was corporeally assumed into heaven only three days after her death, she left her original tomb without a body. Items believed to have been touched or owned by Mary were often collected and venerated including biological relics; locks of hair, nail clippings, etc., as well as items that had been in direct contact with her body; her girdle, chemise, and ring.[93] Because many Christians of the Middle Ages and Renaissance viewed Marian relics as having a direct connection to the Virgin, her relics were thought to be capable of performing miracles.

Northern Italy, mainly the Tuscan region, had a prolific cult following of the Sacra Cintola. Florence began their domination of Prato in 1351, a small-town northwest of Florence where this cult is believed to have originated.[94] During this time, tensions rose over the authority of the Virgin's belt. The cintola had supposedly arrived in Prato after Thomas had entrusted it to a holy man of Jerusalem who passed it down to his descendants. One of these men was a priest of the Eastern rite who had a daughter named Maria. With the help of her mother, she eloped with a man from Prato, Michele Dagomari, against her father's wishes. In lieu of a dowry her

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[92] Jones, "Heterosexuality: A Beast with Many Backs," 6.

[93] Seasonwein, 83.

[94] Mayu Fujikawa, "The Medici Judge, a Bitter Lawsuit, and an Embezzlement: The Opera del Sacro Cingolo's Bronze Chapel Screen at Santo Stefano, Prato," *Renaissance Studies* 27, no. 5 (2012): 612.

mother gave Michele the Sacra Cintola which he then brought back to Italy with his bride, keeping it a secret until close to the end of his life when he entrusted it to his local parish priest at the Duomo di Santo Stefano.[95] Its miraculous properties became famous throughout Italy and donations and pilgrimages to see this relic aided in the financial stability of this small town.[96] With some of the resources acquired, the city was able to hire Lorenzo di Filippo, the capomaestro of the Florence cathedral, to build a new chapel to house the relic in 1386. They then hired some of Florence's most prestigious artists to decorate this chapel such as Giovanni d'Ambrogio and Agnolo Gaddi.[97]

While the cult was prominent in Prato and the surrounding areas, devotion to and depictions of the Madonna della Cintola was somewhat sparse outside of Tuscany.[98] Even in Tuscany, representations of the *sacra cintola* declined and eventually ceased to be commissioned in the Cinquecento.[99] However, during the early Quattrocento is when Jacopo Guido had arrived in Florence. During this time is when records indicate that this region was dealing with political issues that focused on the Sacra Cintola, which explains why this iconography was included in the Guidi Hours. He would have been aware of the political situation between Florence and Prato as well as the relevance and importance that this iconography held.

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[95] Cassidy, "A Relic, Some Pictures and the Mothers of Florence in the Late Fourteenth Century," 93-94.

[96] Fujikawa, "The Medici Judge, a Bitter Lawsuit, and an Embezzlement: The Opera del Sacro Cingolo's Bronze Chapel Screen at Santo Stefano, Prato," 618.

[97] Fujikawa, 619.

[98] Elaine G. Tulanowski, "The 'Madonna della Cintola' in Italian Art." *Marian Library Studies* 17, no. 24 (1985): 301.

[99] Tulanowski (1985), 299.

Nuptial gifts such as girdles not only related specifically to motherhood but to the marriage itself. However, it was the girdle that was the most meaningful as it was often given by the bridegroom and carried a much more erotic tone.[100] The nuptial belt was believed to ensure a loving relationship between the couple, endow the woman with beauty and love, promote sexual intercourse, and was symbolic of the beginning of a marriage since a man had to remove it and undress his bride in order to consummate their union. However, the girdle also symbolized chastity. Chastity referred to a woman's virginal status before marriage but once she was married, chastity was then regarded as a woman's ability to remain faithful to her husband. The *sacra cintola* in the Guidi Hours paired with the Song of Songs further emphasized the importance of the husband and wife's ability to have a physical relationship. This portion of the Bible is an erotically charged love poem between two nameless lovers who vocalize their desires for one another. According to the Marian interpretation, this couple was presumed to be Mary and Christ.[101] In fact, liturgies for feasts celebrating the Virgin in the Middle Ages often borrowed verses from the Song of Songs.[102] The verse on fol. 34v is the portion questioning who had come smelling like myrrh and frankincense, which was interpreted as Mary during her Assumption—when she was believed to have tossed down her belt to Thomas.

> By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my

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[100] Kirshner, *Marriage, Dowry, and Citizenship in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy,* 60.

[101] Arthur Green, "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs: Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in its Historical Context," *AJS Review* 26, no. 1 (2002): 5-6.

[102] Rory G. Critten and Annette Kern-Stahler, "Smell in the York Corpus Christi Plays," In *The Five Senses in Medieval and Early Modern England*, edited by Annette Kern-Stahler, Beatrix Busse, and Wietse de Boer (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 258.

> soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please. Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant? Behold his bed, which is Solomon's; threescore valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war: every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night. King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon. He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem. Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart. (Song of Solomon 3:1-11).

The Guidi reader would have been aware of the Song of Solomon, its erotic nature, and the duty she held as a wife. However, since she would have been a virgin, a poem discussing an emotional intimacy between the lovers would have eased any tension she felt before her wedding night. Oddly, the verse included on fol. 34v separates the two distinct tones of this chapter. The beginning of the chapter is of a woman waiting for her lover and is sexually suggestive while the second portion focuses on war and soldiers. This seems to date this book to the time period immediately before Jacopo attempted to conquer Florence. If this is the case, this verse would have intended to comfort our reader as she waited for Jacopo to return home to her. The unusual iconography above this verse supports this theory as it is visually connected to political disturbances throughout Florence in regard to the Prato during the early period of the fifteenth century.

The woman marrying into the Guidi family would have been expected to learn and understand their history and values. The inclusion of the *sacra cintola* aimed to rid her of any dangers relating to pregnancy and raise the likelihood of having male children. This image of a girdle and text referring to the Song of Solomon was also a wish for the couple to be able to

copulate and maintain a physical intimacy that was happy and healthy and allowed for a stronger relationship.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Guidi Hours functioned not only as a typical book of hours but also to guide the bride of Jacopo to be a woman suitable for the Guidi family. Its reader would have believed that prayers and images would have been able to prevent or aid in issues related to sexual intimacy, pregnancy, childbirth, and the care of her children.

Due to the number of images relating to female health we are able to presume that this book of hours would have been given to a woman. Because there is not much information surrounding Jacopo Guido we are unable to determine whether he was engaged or married nor if he had any children. However, as discussed in the second chapter, the Guidi coat of arms and a portrait of the patron was included leading us to believe this may have gifted to Jacopo's betrothed. The economic status of the Guidi family further allows us to assume that this bride was in her mid to late teens and of a higher social standing. These facts then allow us to analyze what knowledge this reader would have had prior to interacting with this object as well as how this information would have informed and shaped her reception of these images.

As our reader would have come across two images of the *virgo lactans* in the Office of the Virgin she would have found herself reminded of her family's—natal and nuptial—expectation of her to provide male heirs for her husband. However, simply birthing children would not have sufficed. In order to produce acceptable offspring, it was necessary for her to ensure that she maintained an optimal temperament, continuous religious devotion, and was physically ideal. Based on medical and religious discourses surrounding the importance of these various aspects regarding the woman herself, our female reader's understanding of this iconography went beyond an image of Mary and Christ, or of a mother and child, but imparted instructions on how to be a model for her gender.

The ways in which a bride-to-be of the Guidi family in the fifteenth century would have interacted with and understood these images has been a critical element to this study. As expectations for women were articulated as well as demonstrated in public and private spaces, our reader would have been instilled with Christian notions regarding her own behaviors. The images discussed in chapters three and four clearly emphasize behavior that the female reader needed to be devoted to God as well as to her husband. The *sacra cintola* demonstrates this by referencing the Virgin Mary in order to express the importance of the woman's chastity and remaining pure in the eyes of Christ. However, the girdle would have also signified the chastity that a wife must maintain for her husband as well as her sexual availability for him. The iconographies of both the *sacra cintola* and the *virgo lactans* were believed to guarantee successful consummation and to prevent issues regarding pregnancy and childbirth. Scientific and religious discussions regarding women's health may explain why this book would have strayed away from typical iconography in order to emphasize specific ideals for women. By including these images in the Guidi Hours, Jacopo may have been attempting to assure a long successful marriage as well as the safety and health of his wife and future children.

Unfortunately, much more research must be done to fully analyze this object. Scholarship on the *sacra cintola,* Jacopo Guido, and unusual iconography included in books of hours is lacking and any sort of analysis of the Guidi Hours itself is altogether absent. Further research on the remaining images and text would be beneficial to fully understand this object within the context of fifteenth-century Florence. While the manuscript itself is short of key elements found in most books of hours, the unusual iconography calls for additional studies of this object.

Figures

Figure 1. *Madonna of Humility*, detail. Book of Hours, Italy, early-fifteenth century. Use of Rome. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Department of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, MS M.3, fol. 1r. (http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/1/76833)

Figure 2. Pisano, Andrea. *Baptism of his disciples*. Gilded bronze relief, ca. 1330-1336. Florence, South baptistry doors, Duomo di Firenze. (https://www.bluffton.edu/homepages/facstaff/sullivanm/italy/florence/pisanosouth/pisanosouthdoors.html)

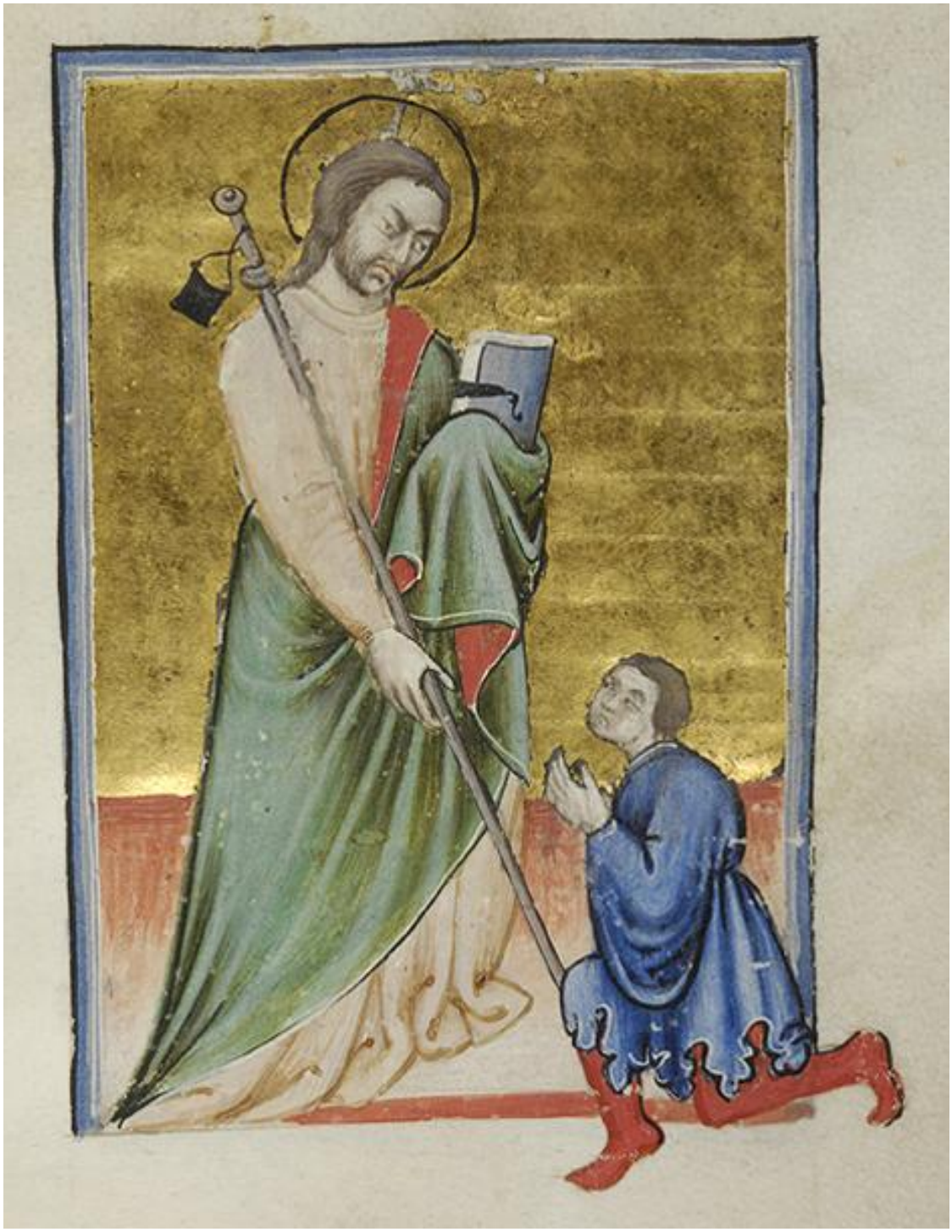
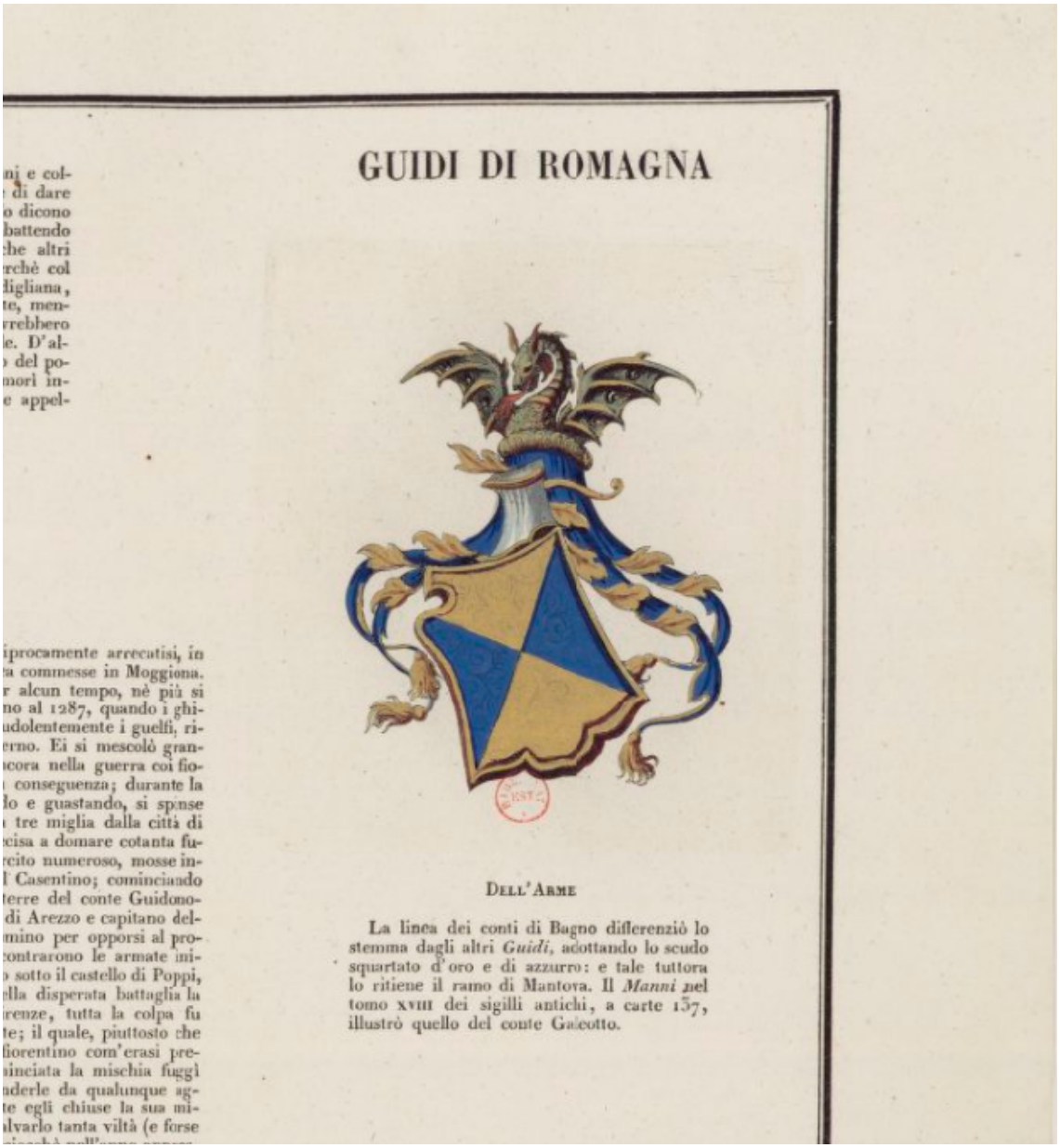


Figure 3. *Apostle James Major with Donor*. Book of Hours, Italy, early-fifteenth century. Use of Rome. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Department of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, MS M.3, fol. 91r. (http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/23/76833)



GUIDI DI ROMAGNA

DELL'ARME

La linea dei conti di Bagno differenziò lo stemma dagli altri *Guidi*, adottando lo scudo squartato d'oro e di azzurro: e tale tuttora lo ritiene il ramo di Mantova. Il *Manni* nel tomo XVIII dei sigilli antichi, a carte 157, illustrò quello del conte Galeotto.

Figure 4. Litta, Pompeo. Guidi di Romagna coat of arms, detail. *Famiglie celebri di Italia. Guidi di Romagna,* tavola III. Printed Monograph. Italy, ca. 1819-1852. France, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. (https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84523463/f4.item.r=guidi%20guidi.zoom)

Figure 5. *Madonna and Child before a Niche*. Bronze plaquette, Italy, 3.75 x 3 inches, mid-fifteenth century. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art. (https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.44083.html)

Figure 6. *Madonna of Humility*. Book of Hours, Italy, early-fifteenth century. Use of Rome. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Department of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, MS M.3, fol. 1r. (http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/1/76833)

Figure 7. *Madonna of Humility*, detail. Book of Hours, Italy, early-fifteenth century. Use of Rome. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Department of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, MS M.3, fol. 1r. (http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/1/76833)

Figure 8. *Madonna of Humility.* Book of Hours, Italy, early-fifteenth century. Use of Rome. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Department of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, MS M.3, fol. 59v. (http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/9/76833)

Figure 9. Gaddi, Agnolo. *Madonna and Child Adored by Two Angels.* Tempera on wood panel, 28.32 x 19.04 inches, ca. 1369-1396. Tucson, University of Arizona Museum of Art. (https://uarizona.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/9233253F-5130-452A-A6E1-612009606930)

Figure 10. Zenale, Bernardo. *Madonna con il Bambino e due angeli.* Oil on panel, 37.8 x 25.2 inches, ca. 1500-1502. Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera. (https://pinacotecabrera.org/en/collezione-online/opere/madonna-con-il-bambino-e-due-angeli-2/)

Figure 11. *Resting on the Flight to Egypt.* Hours of Cecilia Gonzaga, Italy, ca. 1470. Use of Rome. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Department of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, MS M.454, fol. 207r. (http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/46/77330)

Figure 12. *Flight into Egypt.* Psalter Hour, Netherlands, last quarter of the thirteenth century. London, British Library, Harley 2930, fol. 38. (https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=21090)

Figure 13. *The Virgin and Child.* Book of Hours, Netherlands, ca. 1405-1410. Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, MS M.40, 90.ML.139, fol. 14. (http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/1514/masters-of-dirc-van-delf-attributed-to-johannes-de-malborch-book-of-hours-dutch-about-1405-1410/)

Figure 14. Da Vinci, Leonardo. *The hemisection of a man and woman in the act of coition.* Pen and ink, ca. 1490-1492. London, Royal Collection Trust. (https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/21/collection/919097)

Figure 15. *Virgin Mary giving her girdle to Saint Thomas*. Book of Hours, Italy, early-fifteenth century. Use of Rome. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Department of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, MS M.3, fol. 34v. (http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/7/76833)

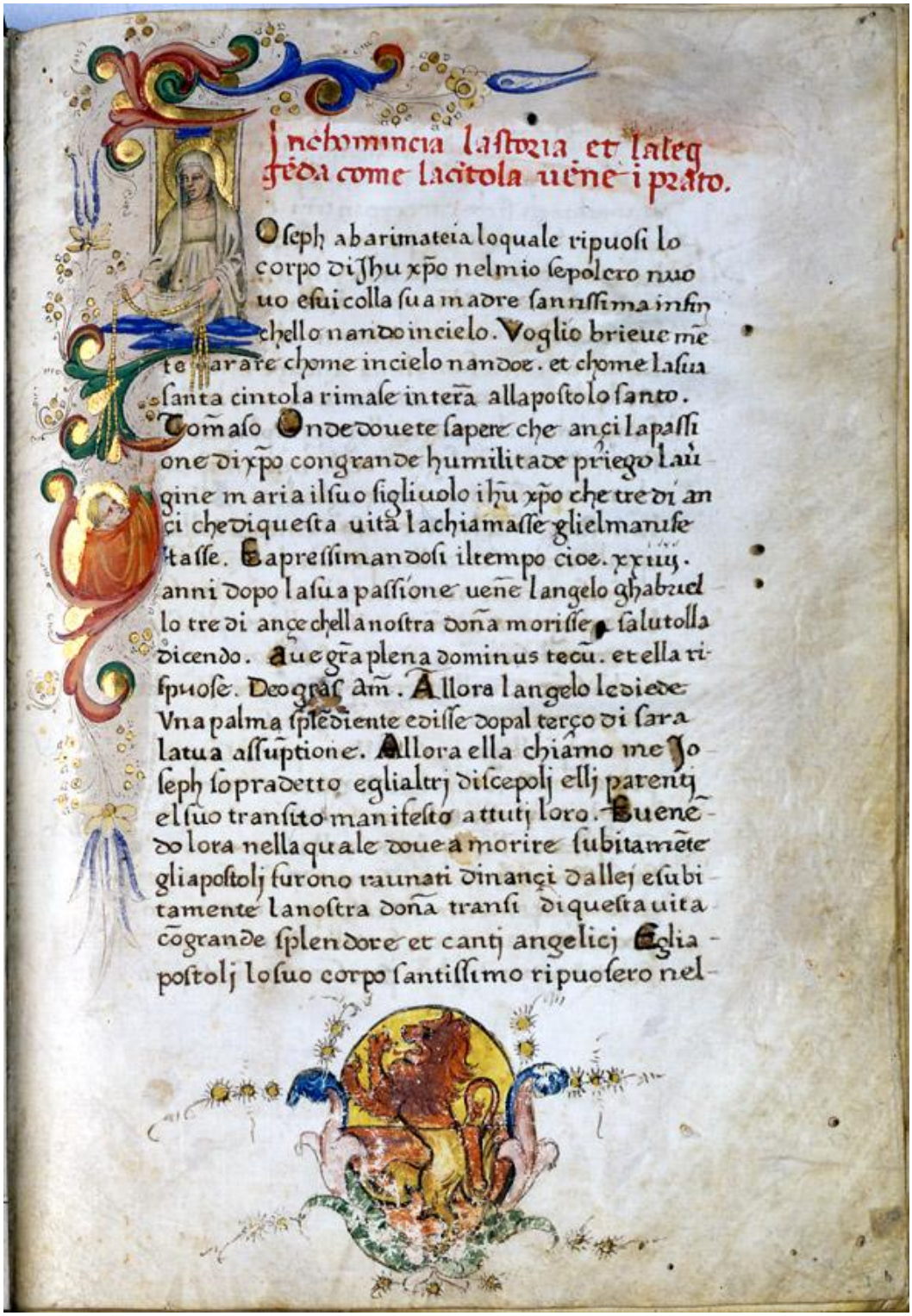


Figure 16. *Historia Cinguli virginis Mariae*. Marcovaldi codex, Italy, ca. 1384-1428. Prato, Biblioteca Roncioniana, Q.II.7 XV.1, fol. 1r. (http://www406.regione.toscana.it/bancadati/codex/codex/PO0005-QII007-001r.jpg)

Figure 17. Agnolo, Gaddi. *Madonna della Cintola.* Fresco, ca. 1392-1395. Prato, Cappella della Sacra Cintola, Duomo di Santo Stefano. (https://www.dianagieseeditorial.com.au/the-virgins-girdle.html)

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